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## Familial Relations: Spaces, Subjects and Politics

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Families matter.

Irresponsibility. Selfishness. Behaving as if your choices have no consequences.

Children without fathers. Schools without discipline. Reward without effort.

Crime without punishment. Rights without responsibilities. Communities without control.

...But I repeat today, as I have on many occasions these last few years, that the reason I am in politics is to build a bigger, stronger society.

Stronger families. Stronger communities. A stronger society.

...[I]f we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start.

David Cameron, Monday 15 August 2011<sup>1</sup>

Following rioting in some parts of England in August 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron asserted that 'families matter'. 'Broken' families, he suggested were a primary cause of the social disorder that provoked the riots. Fatherless families, negligent or ineffectual parents, families 'that everyone in their neighbourhood knows and often avoids' required government intervention, in order to get the nation back on track. Restoring orderly families led to the creation of a 'family test' by which all social policy initiatives would be judged by their effect on the family, but also more police, less bureaucratic red tape, more education, and a restoration of morality in politics. Britain's 'security fightback' must work in tandem with its 'social fightback,' Cameron asserted, because social disorder threatens the security of a 'great country of good people.'

Cameron's speech can be read as an iteration of a familiar conservative reprisal—family values, personal responsibility, strong policing. The family has been a target of state intervention since states began to perceive and orient themselves towards a society. As Donzelot (1979: 92) argued, creating social order by managing the family was a primary concern in early liberal statecraft. Consequently, the problems of the liberal state were defined around forms of familial intervention, and the family linked individuals to a series of state and non-state institutions (see Martin, 2012). Most state governments—liberal, social democratic, socialist, authoritarian, and otherwise—continue to distribute social citizenship benefits through family-making practices like marriage, childbirth and care. Immigration policies privilege biological kinship and heteronormative family

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from "PM's speech on the fightback after the riots", Monday 15 August 2011. Available at: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots/>

forms (Simmons, 2008) and familial gender roles often circumscribe women's migration (Yeoh et al., 2005). Yet employment-based migration schemes often require long-term family separation (Pratt 2004, 2009; Graham et al., 2012). Nations, citizenship, and states are made in, through, and on behalf of families.

So, clearly families *do* matter. But we also want to ask *what makes a family?* And if there are many answers to this question, then *how* exactly do families come to matter, in *what ways?* *Where, when and to whom* do families matter? While geographers have provided rich analyses of gender, social reproduction, and capitalism; sexuality and space; and the boundaries of public and private space, these approaches have circled around 'the family'. There are good reasons for this. Scholars engaged with these themes have sought analytic starting points that denaturalize the biological family as a site of feminine labour, normative sexuality, and depoliticization. In addition, problematizing the *spatialities* of labour, sexuality and politics has opened up a more complex, nuanced set of relationships that resist seemingly heteronormative allusions to the familial. As a result, however, family has become an 'absent presence' (Valentine, 2008) in these studies, haunting now well-established geographical conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, home, private space, social reproduction, livelihoods, and childhood.

That the family has been rather under-represented has not gone unnoticed. Hubbard (2000) and Domosh (1999) both call for critical studies of heterosexuality to complement the research on queer, homosexual, and non-normative sexualities in the 'sexuality and space' literature. Nash (2005) argues that biological relatedness permeates concepts of nature, inheritance, genealogy, and identity, and calls for greater attention to 'geographies of relatedness' in their different forms. Understanding genealogy in terms of genes, rather than blood or territorial ties, has also provoked new approaches to kinship studies in anthropology, as 'new reproductive technologies' have transformed how people negotiate their own sense of relatedness (Carsten et al., 2000; Strathern, 2005).

Geographies of family might also usefully engage what we have referred to above as the 'hauntings' of family that are present in the existing geographical literature. For instance, work on social reproduction has meticulously shown how certain family practices are crucial to the functioning of capitalism in particular contexts, constituting both productive and reproductive labour, to the extent that such a distinction holds (see for example Mitchell et al., 2003). The feminist ethos that inspires much of this work is also alive to the ways in which family can cloak a variety of inequalities, particularly in relation to gender and age. However, studies of social reproduction often narrow down (or round up) the range of relationships that are defined as familial to those that are heteronormative, or at least heterosexual. They also focus primarily on the constitution of families vis a vis capitalism, reading diverse family practices as acts of production and reproduction.

The norm and normativity of family-member as carer means families appear a great deal in literature. However, acts of caring are practices that connect a whole range of subjects, and indeed are used to invoke a broad intersubjective ethic beyond kinship (Lawson, 2007). Queer theorists have argued for the legal recognition of care relations over conjugal or blood ties as a way of decentering the family's privileged juridical position in liberal societies (Borneman, 2001; Butler, 2002). While sexuality and space literatures rarely focus on the family per se (although see Valentine et al 2003, Gorman-Murray 2008), interdisciplinary efforts to define an expanded,

intersubjective ethic of caring offer a starting point for an investigation of what family might be(come), where and when it is done, and how care and familial relatedness do and do not constitute each other. As the contributions from Graham et al (2012), Martin (2012), Lee and Pratt (2012) in this issue show, familial care relations continue to do much work politically, legally, and ethically. Further studies of the complex relationship between family and care promise to flesh out the intersecting forms of normalization and subjectification at work in everyday life.

Children's geographies also make reference to the family. This sub-discipline has sought to (re-) place children in a whole series of geographical accounts that assume adult subjects, and unpack the agency of children in affecting socio-spatial change (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). In such accounts the family has been repeatedly invoked as a key context and constraint in children's lives, and is used as a venue for exploring adult-child relationships (for a recent example see Punch et al., 2010). However such work rarely discusses the ways in which families are collective subjects that children co-produce. The close association between children *and* families also risks ghettoising studies of family within children's geographies (c.f. Hopkins & Pain, 2007; Vanderbeck, 2007), ignoring both the family practices of adult children and parents (the normative family grown up) and non-normative family forms that in some cases do not use biological kinship as the ground for constituting a family (e.g. queer families, couples without children).

While geographies of social reproduction, care and children offer excellent resources through which to begin thinking about the family geographically, such approaches also have their limitations. In some of these studies, families become raw fodder for theorising the world in other ways. In other cases, it is assumed that the signifier 'family' has a stable meaning, and family is placed in a conceptual 'black box', where it remains, unexamined. As Harker (2012), Martin (2012), and Lee and Pratt (2012) argue in their contributions to this issue, however, a host of discourses, policies, and spatial practices produce heterogeneous familial subjects. We want to suggest that there are a whole series of geographic concerns that could benefit from further and fuller engagement with familial spaces and practices. This inattention, or more precisely the particular ways in which geographers have paid attention to family, has resulted in a limited conceptualization of various social processes constituted by and through families in geographical thought. This shortcoming, in turn, limited our ability to respond creatively to conservative political uses of family. And as Cameron's call to arms illustrates, the stakes are high. Focusing on immigration enforcement, everyday life in Palestine, military families, migrating mothers, single women, Christian communities, and neoliberal parenting, the articles in this themed issue begin to fill out geographic conceptualizations of how the family matters. In what follows, we locate the contributions to this special issue in recent thinking on intimate spatialities, subjects, and politics, and point to ways in which various family geographies provoke creative rethinking of core geographic concerns.

### **Intimate Spatialities**

Valentine's (2008, page 2106) response to the family's absent presence within geographical studies is to call for 'a new geography of intimacy that might mark a "private" turn within the discipline'. While we are not convinced that characterising such work through recourse to one half of a (public-private) binary that much feminist work has worked hard to overcome (Staeheli, 1996) is useful, we are animated by recent interventions on the geographies of intimacy. In particular, we value Oswin & Olund's (2010) discussion of intimacy as a 'dispositive' – a heterogeneous ensemble of relations

designed to respond to a particular 'need' - that produces subjectivity across a range of scales. Their notion of intimacy refigures the scalar opposition between the local and global, insisting instead that the resolutely everyday nature of so-called 'global' processes undermines global-local scalings altogether (see also Pratt and Rosner, 2006; Hyndman and Mountz, 2006). This notion of intimacy changes the way geographers (and others) think about key spatial concepts like proximity and distance. As Oswin and Olund argue, 'closeness' does not necessarily map onto 'nearness.' A similar geographical imagination has invigorated studies of the transnational family, moving family beyond the local by examining how movement across borders refigures familial intimacies (Ong, 1999; Yeoh et al., 2005; Pratt, 2009). In this issue, Lee and Pratt (2012) offer an analytical approach that connects the common historical circumstances of Filipino soldiers in the US military and Filipino domestic workers in Canada, a method that finds political possibilities in shared diasporic experiences of mourning and loss.

What is also clear from this approach is that family itself becomes practiced and thought about in different ways, made malleable as it is caught between norms of what an intimate familial association should be and socio-economic necessity. As Graham et al. (2012) show in this issue, female migrants 'mother' from abroad through text messages and frequent calls. Permeated by imaginaries of place and experiences of absence and longing, such practices allow 'being family' to retain significance in the face of physical separation. In Martin's (2012) work on US immigration detention, familial relatedness is both an object of state intervention, a vehicle of population management, territorial control and a powerful normative critique of the over-extension of executive power into private space. These different familial normativities rely upon and reproduce certain spatial imaginings of home, incarceration, and transnational mobility. Valentine et al's (2012) paper also foregrounds the constitutive role of space, particularly understandings of domestic space (as safe) and public space (as dangerous), in their examination of familial attitudes and practices pertaining to alcohol consumption. In all of these contributions, families are placed in a cleavage between the norms of intimacy and the pragmatics of everyday life by a whole range of state policies (see also Ramdas, 2012; Oswin forthcoming), affirming Oswin & Olund's (2010: 62) contention that intimate relationships 'are as much matters of the heart as of the state'. However, we might also consider how, following Lee & Pratt (2012), the affective intensities of family life (e.g. mourning the loss of a family member) are not only enrolled in, but excessive to commodification and biopolitical technologies of normalization, classification and control (see also Valentine et al 2012). And as Sharma's (2012) discussion of family and church also makes clear, the state is far from the only institution that governs (family) life, a fact that future geographic research might explore further.

The less mobile women who are the subject of Sharma's (2012) paper also provide another juxtaposition with the more mobile subjects found in many existing geographies of family. There is now a fairly rich archive of work that explores the ways in which family is dynamic precisely because of the transnational mobility of particular family members (see Smith, 2011). However, we know comparatively little about the dynamics of less geographically mobile families, who have dwelled in particular places for a long time. As Stenning et al's (2010) detailed study of neoliberalism and family life in post-socialist Poland and Slovakia demonstrates, family relations and practices in such situations are not necessarily less dynamic than those of transnational families. Rather, rapidly changing socio-economic environments are both manifest in and ameliorated through a whole range of familial relationships. Thus, familial relationships are directly related to the conditions of

im/mobility that structure core geographic processes like transnational migration, nation-making, and everyday life.

## Subjects

Working along the contours of what she terms 'liberal diasporas', a space of circulation that incorporates all those impacted by European imperialism (see also Lin, 2003; Oswin, 2010), Povinelli (2006: 4) argues that in order to understand the iteration of the free individual subject of liberalism (what she terms the 'autological subject'), we must also attend to the constitution of 'genealogical society... discourses, practices and fantasies about the social constraints placed on the autological subject by various kinds of inheritances'. Povinelli's argument helps to position the contemporary family as not simply one among many forms of intimate relations, but rather a constitutive feature of the liberal individual subject and liberal sociality more generally. In other words, in many contexts the family is the privileged form of associational life (or the proper form of 'genealogical society'). To examine the family in liberal diasporas is to examine the relationship between individual and collective familial subjects. Likewise, when studying processes of individualization, we must be alive to the ways in which such studies raise questions about familial life. For instance, narratives like responsabilization often presume families, rather than states, as proper providers of support. Family and children's law, premised on individual legal subjects, mobilize co-constitutive parent- and child-subjects, creating contradictions between familial and sovereign legal subjects (Ruddick, 2007; Martin, 2011). If we start, as Povinelli suggests, with the long historical mutual constitution of the individual liberal subject and a genealogical other, then processes of individualisation are better thought about as a refiguring of subjects and the ways in which they emerge from, contribute to and are governed by the relation between the individual and the family (see also Oswin forthcoming).

This fault line is made clearly visible in Valentine and Hughes' (forthcoming) work on internet gambling and family life in the UK. Gambling not only creates economic problems, but also ruptures the relation between the individual and the family, opening it up to scrutiny, reflection and potential recalibration. In this issue, Ramdas (2012) traces the way in which Singaporean family policies, community ideals, and single women are not only mutually constituted through practices and conflicts over marriage and singlehood, but also constituted by the geographies through and across which such relations are practiced. Similarly, Sharma (2012) demonstrates how individual women's experiences and understandings of family are constituted by church spaces, and the resonances and overlaps between religious and family practices. Valentine et al. (2012) trace how the proliferation of neoliberal logics of choice and personal responsibility has led, on the one hand, to intensive child-centered parenting and, on the other hand, to a refusal to discipline others' children. For them, the rise of self-interested, desocialized parenting has broader impacts on society. Such arguments resonate with Harker's (2012) discussion around the precariousness of Palestinian life, or the ways in which Palestinian lives are highly dependent on the lives of others. Harker's paper points to the way that discussions which frame Palestinian subjects as individuals (e.g. 'bare life') overlook families, whose spatial practices are important for their potential ability to reduce heightened exposure to violence. Questions about the mutual constitution of the individual-social might also be framed in relation to growing literatures that trace family and intimacy across modernist human/non-human divides (Haraway, 2007, 2010; Lorimer & Davies, 2010; Nash, 2005, Power, 2008). We have not accomplished this here, although we look forward to work that pursues such questions.

## **Politics**

Familial spaces and subjects unfold through a multitude of political practices, sites and institutions, including and exceeding official state policy-making. As Martin (2012) and Lee and Pratt (2012) show in their articles, families are crucial sites of inclusion/exclusion, biopolitical power, and refusal of state control. However, much geographical work has assumed such practices rather than explicated them, summed them up in a tangential reference rather than subject them to systematic investigation. In this regard, geographers lag far behind the work of anthropologists such as Singerman (1995, 2006), who argues that what she terms a 'family ethos' structures much of communal life for the large number of Cairenes who are excluded from the politic sphere of autocratic rule in Egypt. Crucially however, this does not mean such families are depoliticized. Rather, the family becomes the basis for a different kind of politics, something similar to what Bayat (2010) has termed 'the quiet encroachment of the ordinary': a politics of redress that works through the collective, but uncoordinated actions of large numbers of disparate actors. What such studies show are forms of family life that take place beyond state governance. By this we are not suggesting that such families are freed from the entanglements of being governed, but rather, as both Lee & Pratt (2012) and Harker (2012) suggest, from amidst such entanglements other forms of politics might be possible. Ramdas (2012) argues that women's rationalizations of how marriage norms do and do not apply to them illuminate a broader politics of 'waiting.' To make such a claim is to suggest that families enable different types of political practice, and that such practices themselves may reconstitute families.

The papers in this issue cover a diverse range of themes and approaches, whose insights are gained precisely from a more sustained effort to pry apart and interrogate familial relationships. Collectively they demonstrate the possibilities that may be opened up through greater empirical and conceptual focus on the familial. We hope that such possibilities do not consolidate a 'geography of the familial', but rather offer a series of starting points for future inquiry.

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